

FOLLY'S QUEENS.

CHAPTER I.

FIRE-GIRL AND KING'S MISTRESS

Those who have made Satan's character a study tell us that his ruling policy in winning the world to himself is to select handsome women with brilliant intellects for his adjutants. And facts and our own observation compel us to admit, ungallant as it is, that the assertion is true. There are many reasons in extenuation of this fact, not generally considered by moralists who delight in sermonizing over "lovely woman's folly." They start out with the proposition that a woman who is endowed with intellect and beauty, and is of bad morals, must necessarily have been created so, and that she acts solely from impulses beyond her control. Their inconsistency becomes apparent at once, when in the face of this belief they condemn the woman for that which they claim she is irresponsible. People of liberal ideas look upon mankind as the creatures of circumstance, and regard their actions, whether good or bad, as the outcome of certain conditions of life. The man or woman who holds this view is always charitable and forgiving with their fellows. They may condemn, but their condemnation is seasoned with pity.

In contemplating the character of famously infamous women who have reigned as Queens in Folly's Court, it is hoped that the reader of these articles describing their career, will be among those who are more willing to forgive than condemn. With but few exceptions the lives of these women were moulded by adverse circumstances. They strutted their brief hour on life's stage creatures of the present, taking no note of time and the sorrows and remorse it might bring. God and they alone know what their punishment was.

The moral that their lives teach is all that concerns us. Let us glance at that of one of Folly's fairest sovereigns, merry Nell Gwynne.

This "archest of hussies" was born in the little town of Hereford, England. A mean, rickety old shanty is pointed out as the place of her birth. The gossips there little thought that a child so humbly born would be the mother of a line of dukes, or that her great grandson should be the bishop of her native town, and occupy for forty years the Episcopal palace in close proximity to the shaky dwelling-place where his grand-mother first saw the light.

Nell was born in 1650, and tradition states that at a very early age she ran away from home and went to London. Shortly after her arrival there she gave evidence of that enterprise and energy which was to carry her to fame and fortune by engaging in the fish business. She roamed the streets, selling fish by day, and rambled from tavern to tavern at night entertaining the company after supper with songs and was an occasional attendant in the house of a noted courtesan, Madame Ross. In this way she soon became a character of London, and one of the most popular of her kind. She found plenty of time while crying the merits of her stock to banter ribald jokes with the lusty, red-faced yokels who were her neighbors and competitors. Her wit made her a dangerous opponent in a verbal contest with more lofty acquaintances, too, as all who engaged her in wordy battle had good reason to know. She could flatter a customer into buying double his needs and make one who concluded, after looking over her